

contains evidence in its favour of such strength that it is not unreasonable for a psychical researcher to consider it authentic, though it would be over-optimistic to expect it to carry conviction with the confirmed sceptics.

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PARAPSYCHOLOGY: AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF ESP. By J. Gaither Pratt. Doubleday, New York. 300 pp. \$4.95.

Dr Pratt possesses the almost unique distinction of having pursued his chosen career as a professional parapsychologist continuously ever since his student days. Until recently, when he accepted a research post in the University of Virginia, he has worked under Dr Rhine at the Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke, the university which he first entered as a student of divinity. In 1932 he switched to psychology, and his first contact with parapsychology came soon after this when he was enlisted as a student helper in Rhine's early trials with the card-guessing technique. Since then, Dr Pratt has experienced at close quarters all the extraordinary gains and setbacks which have characterised the recent history of experimental parapsychology. Almost alone among his colleagues at Duke, or anywhere else in the world for that matter, he has remained consistently faithful to the subject, neither throwing in his hand and taking up some other career, nor resorting to the common device of substituting academic criticism or theoretical discourse for the harder path of practical experimentation.

Pratt's career has spanned many phases in the psi saga. First came the apparent 'breakthrough', when the Duke people had a plethora of high scoring subjects and universal acceptance and confirmation seemed imminent. Then came the stormy years of controversy, followed by the lean years of scores only marginally different from chance. Then came the fashion for looking for secondary patterns and effects (decline through the run, psi missing, displacement etc.) in order to demonstrate a supposedly concealed or devious manifestation of ESP. Then there was the PK or dice-willing phase, which itself followed a peculiar course, beginning with straightforward successful results, and ending in devious effects unintended by the subjects. Then there was the fashion for dividing potential ESP subjects according to personality variables, in an effort to obtain reproducible results by identifying consistently negative and consistently positive scoring individuals. Then there was the phase of concern with the guessing patterns of successful high-scorers, like

Soal's subject Gloria Stewart, in the hope that these would yield clues to the ESP process. And amongst all these developments time was found for more adventurous field work, analysis of reports of spontaneous ESP experiences, experiments to test for an ESP element in the homing behaviour of pigeons, the statistical evaluation of statements by mediums, and even visits to poltergeist houses. Pratt has taken a leading part throughout, and although he would be the first to admit that not one of these approaches has led to unequivocal conclusions, his enthusiasm for pursuit of the elusive psi and his belief in the ultimate success of the endeavour, remain undiminished.

With such a background in the author, one might be inclined to expect too much of a book of this nature. It is in fact a chatty collection of reminiscences of some of the researches which Dr Pratt has himself conducted. It is a strictly non-technical book, and it includes a good deal of elementary explanatory matter about psychical research in general, so that a reader unfamiliar with the subject might follow it with ease. There are no great revelations not already known to students of the original published reports. Nevertheless, the specialist reader will be fascinated to note the topics chosen and the general opinions expressed by such an expert author.

For example, in discussing the evidence for mediumistic 'communications', Dr Pratt gives a brief review of the cross-correspondences, book tests and other material from S.P.R. publications of years gone by. What does such a pragmatic, statistically minded modern experimenter make of this old material? Actually, he deals with it extremely kindly, but with a certain detached reserve. 'It seemed to them', writes Dr Pratt, with reference to early investigators, 'that many of the names and detailed descriptions of personal circumstances were too unmistakably accurate to attribute the results to chance coincidence' (page 176). A little later (page 191) he writes: 'Unfortunately, by the time we had come to appreciate what was required for an adequate evaluation of the verbal material of mediumship, the emphasis in parapsychological research had swung away from this particular line of study.'

No such note of reserve enters into Dr Pratt's discussion of the experimental evidence for precognition. This topic is of interest not only on account of the particular importance attached to the possibility of bridging a gap in time, but also because ESP experiments designed to establish precognition are generally rather superior in the rigour with which sensory cues and other dangers of spurious effects are excluded. Criticism has been

directed at the small effects produced in precognition tests, and the possibility that large numbers of unpublished experiments that failed might reduce the total to statistical insignificance. On this point, Dr Pratt gives a quite firm opinion (page 161). After quoting some half dozen series conducted since 1955, all of which gave statistically significant results, Dr Pratt comments: 'As I write I know of only one precognition test conducted during this period which produced only chance results.'

On the question of whether one should test numbers of unselected subjects, or search for a gifted high-scorer, Dr Pratt refers to the Duke tradition favouring the former (page 74), but remarks that it did not work for him, since he soon earned the reputation of a Jonah whose participation prevented other experimenters achieving significant results. In fact, he carried out some systematic trials in collaboration with Peggy Price which appeared to confirm this impression.

One of the most interesting chapters deals with Dr Pratt's work on the homing ability of pigeons, a research problem on which he spent some years, and collaborated with scientists from other fields. The hazards and difficulties of obtaining suitable birds, and of trying to make them perform under 'test' conditions, are convincingly recounted. It appears that, contrary to the belief of pigeon fanciers that birds need training, they are in fact able, to a significant extent, to make towards home when released for the first time at unfamiliar points far from their base. They can be transported in closed boxes without detriment to their performance, but they need to fly into the air and see the sun before they can point towards home. Just how they do this remains a deep mystery. In order to test the possibility of an extrasensory element Dr Pratt tried the ingenious expedient of moving the home loft to see if pigeons would return to the old place or find the new one. Unfortunately, the birds didn't like change, and even when they knew where the loft had gone they persisted in coming back to the old spot. Experiments in barren plains, where it seemed there was nothing to define the spot save the loft itself, still failed to deceive the birds, whose instincts were either to return to their old haunt or not to bother to return at all. The birds have thus succeeded in tantalising the experimenters without giving away their secret.

This fascinating book ends with the author's confession of belief that the current scientific trend for disregarding, or actually denying, the existence of mind is likely to be reversed as research into psi phenomenon progresses.

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